DISCUSSION PAPER 9

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Responsibility and Partnership in Swedish Aid Discourse

Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala 2001

Indexing terms

Aid policy
Development aid
Partnership
Africa
Sweden

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ISSN 1104-8417
ISBN 91-7106-473-7

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Printed in Sweden by Reprocentralen HSC, Uppsala 2001

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Responsibility and Partnership in Swedish Aid Discourse

In 1997 the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs elaborated a 'New Policy for Africa'. Its purpose was to co-ordinate the country's cultural assistance, trade and development aid to African countries by giving these activities a frame of common goals and an ideological rationale, emphasising 'partnership' rather than 'solidarity' or 'aid'. This paper analyses the metaphors and paradoxes of the rhetorical draping of the policy as presented in the main report and the speeches of various officials. Of particular concern is what image of moral and reciprocal relations the policy mediates. The influence on Social Democratic vocabulary of the languages of international developmentalism and neo-liberalism will also be in focus.

SWEDISH AID TO AFRICA

In 1995 a new Social Democrat government was elected in Sweden. An active interest in international humanitarian issues is one of the hallmarks by which the Social Democratic government wants to be recognised in the international community. National debts and a budget deficit over a number of years have led to restraints on international aid. The new government was faced with the dilemma of cutting down costs while flagging for renewed solidarity. It started by reforming the bureaucratic organization of Swedish development cooperation—merging and shrinking a number of agencies—and then proposed its intentions for the new 'future-oriented policy' for Africa. The general level of aid was not immediately expanded. The Statement of Government Policy of 16 September 1997 however announced an ambition to gradually increase international aid, claiming that it was going "against the international trend".

THE BACKGROUND

Why was a new policy needed? At a very general level, the end of the Cold War and of apartheid were presented as crucial. The Minister for Development Cooperation, Mr Schori and his under-secretary of state, Mr Karlsson

repeatedly argued that in the wake of these changes, there are new positive trends in Africa. A wave of democratisation is giving rise to a new generation of leaders within politics, industry and popular movements. Debate is freer now, it is said, and "economies have been deregulated, liberalised and reformed in a market-oriented mood, and several countries have had better economic growth than the OECD countries". All this was seen to herald a new era.

Other more specific reasons for the new policy related to the humanitarian internationalist image mentioned above. Sweden was said to worry about the conditionalities on aid delivered by the joint programmes of the European Union. The Lomé convention gives most countries south of the Sahara (apart from South Africa) an agreement on aid and trade with EU. It is about to be renegotiated in 2000. In its present version it is seen by Sweden as far too limited, "a leftover from colonial times" (Karlsson, Sydsvenska Dagbladet, 1997-03-08). There has also been some mild dissatisfaction with the *way* Structural Adjustment Programmes have been imposed by the World Bank and IMF in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Such criticism is more moderately formulated than that directed against the Lomé convention. Sweden has been involved in the World Bank longer than it has been part of EU. The country can thus be held partly responsible for any shortcomings in the Bank's practice. The main target of the criticism has not been the substance of the SAP reforms. These are seen as necessary. The problem, it is said, is rather the mode of delivering the message (Schori, 1997-06-23).

The new policy initiative

The intention for the new policy was first announced in the budget proposal of 1996. In October the same year a working group was appointed in order to write a proposal to be put to the parliament the following autumn. As part of the preparations, it was decided that a couple of conferences should be arranged, to allow

> the leaders of the new generation of Africa to be "invited to contribute with their knowledge and experiences" (Schori, 1997-08-20).

The first conference was arranged jointly by the Nordic Africa Institute and the African Development Bank in Abidjan in January 1997 with the purpose to debate the preconditions for democratic and economic development in Africa[1]. About 15 Swedish diplomats and development experts and some 25 African scholars and experts mainly within the fields of economics, administration and political science were invited.

[1] The proceedings were later published by the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala (NAI) as *A new partnership for African development. Issues and parameters.*

To the second conference, held 25–27 June 1997 in Saltsjöbaden outside Stockholm, were invited some hundred Africans—representatives of governments (the vice presidents of South Africa, Uganda and Botswana) and politicians from the opposition (of Burkina Faso) , representatives of industry and business, the academic world and private organizations as well as other leaders of opinion.[2]

The key concept for the new policy is *partnerskap*. The Minister said:

> Swedish policy for Africa builds on partnership. Partnership for development and partnership for peace and security. We want to build a relationship without discriminatory treatment but with equality, access to our markets, cooperation with investors, exchanges of experience and cultural collaboration. The extensive Swedish assistance to African countries aims at developing this partnership. (Pressrelease from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1997-09-25, translated by the author)

The commission' s report was published as 'Partnership with Africa'. Two conferences with African experts and academics were held. The two conference volumes have similar names although the partnership concept as such does not form so much of a dominating theme in them. The commission report is an attractively printed 170 page volume, with relatively well-edited language and illustrated with an assortment of anonymous African faces, (more often than not radiant with hope). Finally, it was turned into the basis of an official proposition to the parliament on March 5, 1998.[3] Already before the formal decision on it was taken, it was publicized as the new policy to come, for example at a hearing arranged in Uppsala in autumn 1997 for people with particular professional interests in Sweden's relations to Africa.

As noted by Shore and Wright (1997:5) it is difficult to pinpoint what manifestations of a policy really make up the policy, is it the manifestos, the practices it generates, the speeches or the expectations generated in the public? My main concern is neither the lines of action proposed nor how they will be implemented in the future. In this article I will mainly deal with the ideological rationale presented in the preparatory documents. The material consists of three books—two conference volumes, the glossy commissional report—and a number of press statements and speeches put out on the internet. Most texts are produced by the minister or the under-secretary of state in charge or their ghost-writers, Sida officials and conference participants.

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[2] This too was published in a NAI volume titled *Towards a New Partnership with Africa—challenges and opportunities.* The listed categories are those given by Schori 1997–06–23.

[3] 1997/98:122, *Afrika i förändring. En förnyad svensk Afrikapolitik inför 2000-talet*.

The ideological emphasis on partnership formed part of the brief directives to the commission and so preceded the more substantial lines of action proposed and elaborated in the main report. The more instrumental strategies which form part of the policy were presented in the well-read, 'expertise'-based language of the main report which differs distinctively from the rhetorics of the speeches in being less generalising and more academic. It is lucid and factual, with necessary statistics offered (cf. Apthorpe 1997:55f). The arguments are elaborated and statements refined, with suitable qualifications offered to the generalizations made. Development assistance in the conventional form will continue for a time, but Sweden will also more consciously encourage trading relations with individual African countries and work to promote good conditions for African trade in international organizations. Bilateral contacts on a smaller scale, between individual researchers, between partners in cultural exchange, or between cooperative NGOs, should be stimulated, to encourage a multiplicity of alliances on individual and organizational levels. Under the banner of holism, different strands of commercial, developmental and cultural policies are coordinated between different agencies.[4]

In the speeches and press presentations by the Ministry the practical substance of the policy sinks into the background. Emphasis is on relations at an abstract and symbolic level, and on how the counterpart is constructed. The rhetorics are basically about whether we deal with 'charity', 'solidarity' or 'contractual exchange'. The policy claims to be a statement about meeting the other's rightful demands for recognition. Yet I will argue that the way the discourse is phrased at the same time negates the explicit intentions behind the policy.

As Apthorpe has noted, a policy document usually does not only set out a plan of action, but it bases this plan of action in a language intended to uplift and inspire allegiance and to set it out as the inescapable and logical way to act (op. cit. p.45). Compared to the report and the conference volumes, the official summaries, speeches and press statements have a more visible character of political oratory. Their tendency to 'academicise' the discourse is less prominent than in the commissional report, even in the polished form in which the speeches have been made available for analysis.

The speeches that were delivered in the conferences were obviously addressed to another type of audience than was the commissional report. They

[4] A first step in this direction had already been taken in 1995 when the different bodies dealing with development assistance in Sweden were suddenly merged—SIDA dealing with conventional aid, BITS dealing with commercial technological cooperation and SAREC dealing with research cooperation. There was some accompanying reduction in staff. At the time of the merge, no other rationale was offered to the staff and general public than that the government wished to avoid confusion for foreign cooperators who had to deal with several bureaucratic agencies.

appear meant to mobilize sympathy for Sweden yet leave room for a more demanding and outspokenly critical attitude in the future, should the African counterpart not live up to expectations. The likely Swedish audience for the main policy document is people already involved in activities relating to Africa, either professionally or in voluntary activities motivated by solidarity or attraction for what is 'African'. Yet the presentation of the policy in the press does not seem phrased in terms directed to such people. The rhetoric instead appeals to the tired taxpayer and the reluctant businessman, trying to appease them in terms of enlightened self-interest. With some additional polite gestures to the left, the policy is presented very much in neoliberal terms.

One main problem with the commissional report is its continental reference. The commission was to deal with Africa south of the Sahara, for which 'Africa' is offered as shorthand in the opening section of the report. In this place in the text, the necessity of taking account of the political, economic and cultural multiplicity of the continent is recognized. It is even suggested that policies really need to be formulated at a subregional level. Yet the report (p. 12) also states "certain generalizations are necessary and the identification of certain main characteristica are unavoidable in the formulation of a Swedish policy towards Africa" and then consequently sticks to such generalizations. The overarching category 'Africa' is discussed no more in the policy documents, and in the various speeches the usual overall concept abounds.

> ... among the new African leaders, there is strong conviction that Africa itself must take a concerted responsibility for solving conflicts, furthering peace and creating reconciliation between and within the African countries. (Schori, Arbetet 1998-06-08, the author's translation).

This is nothing that evokes reflection in the audience, because in Swedish everyday speech, 'Africa' is the predominant conceptual level whenever conditions in that continent are touched upon. References are very rarely made to individual countries—and even more rarely, of course, to ethnic groups, regions or cultural areas at lower levels.

The prevalent image of Africa in Sweden is as a source of constant misery. That this has to be changed is often stated by the authors of the report and the officials in charge. Getting a nuanced picture, however, does not mean breaking with the habit of thinking of the continent in terms of one broad category. Neither does the main Swedish solidarity organization dealing with the continent, the *Afrikagrupperna*, nor the main scholarly centre, the Nordic Africa Institute, seriously question that the concept Africa indicates a useful level for debate and analysis. The continental concept structures the discourse, the activities and the organizational set-up of the impor-

tant agents in the arena and provides an example of how conceptual inertia is built into organizational structures.

Apart from the report's introduction, which gives examples of differences that make the continent less than a generalizable unit, there is no discussion of what would constitute it as such a unit. The unity is taken for granted. It is implied to be a unity of culture, race and natural environment when emphasis is not put on the continent's shared and distinctive experiences of colonialism.[5] Talking continentally about Africa is partly a deliberate strategy based on the concept that African countries can only successfully perform on the international arena if they merge their economic and political resources. Sweden supports sub-regional co-operation for such reasons, but there is also a rhetorical value put on continental unity. Visions of a united Africa have a legitimate place as political utopias. However, that does not necessarily make them useful guidelines for practical work or for inter-human understanding. Talking in terms of a concept that has been so central to colonial stereotyping may even counteract the politics of recognition that on other levels seems to be the carrying energy of the new policy.

The phrases 'Africa itself' or 'the Africans themselves' figure prominently in the rhetoric, as they have done for many years in Swedish development discourse. The level where this self is located is variable: the trope is handy whether one argues for more concrete participation by aid beneficiaries or accepts national leaders as legitimate representatives of the continent. That the question of political legitimacy is crucial is recognised by the report, even though it does not raise the problem of whether legitimacy and formal democracy are always coupled. Nevertheless there is a carefulness in balancing out any criticism against conditions in Africa as if all Africans collectively share the guilt of any atrocities happening in the continent. The texts recurrently mobilize the African participants in the conferences as representatives of 'the Africans themselves'.

THREE DECADES OF SWEDISH DEVELOPMENTAL DEBATE

The internationalism from which Swedish international aid once originated was based in the Swedish popular movements and in the literary production of a generation of writers such as Jan Myrdal, Sven Lindqvist and Per Wästberg.

Ever since the early 1960s Sweden has sent humanitarian assistance to several African countries. The most common form has been NGO volun-

[5] Such discourse denies the populations in the continent the right to be defined by anything else than by their history of non-African relations. Identity and history enter, as so often in images of the non-European other, only with the European as agent.

teers dealing with refugee assistance or supporting the civil rights movement, trade unions, and churches with legal assistance and inputs into education, culture, social welfare and health care (Moja, 1997:90). Another important form of popular support was the trade boycott against South Africa, undertaken in spite of resistance from Swedish firms that were involved in the region. It is still necessary for Social Democratic politicians to emphasise that after all, in the long run, solidarity was good for business.

With the leftist transnational influence of the late 1960s political pressure in Sweden for active official internationalism grew. There was also a widespread popular involvement in organisations proposing international solidarity.

Boreus (1994) has analysed political language changes of Swedish public debate in the period 1969–1989. She finds that most arenas of debate were dominated by social liberalism in the early 1970s, but that in contrast, economic underdevelopment in the Third World was often explained with reference to the structure of the world economy, inspired by dependency theory. However, in the 1980s factors internal to the developing countries became more and more dominant in explanations of their poverty: bad management, corruption and attempts to restrict market forces. In the early days of development debate, the representatives of private industry had been rather passive, but in the 1980s they became better organised and conscious as opinion-makers on all fronts of societal debate in Sweden. They succeeded in claiming legitimacy for industrial owner interests in contrast to the claims of the labour movement. Boreus traces a general neo-liberal breakthrough in political language to the late 1970s, mainly in relation to economic issues, but also changing the basic meaning of terms such as *demokrati* (Boreus, 1994:87). Despite that development issues were not of central interest to these lobbyists, by the end of the 1980s representatives of both the labour movement and of private industry talked about development in the South in terms of a need for basic structural adjustment, economic liberalisation and a cutdown of public sectors. The independent leftist voices that had emphasised structural injustices had silenced. Boreus finds no agent to single out as particularly forceful in pursuing a neo-liberal development ideology, which suggests that the language of development debates had to adapt to the broader wave of neo-liberalism in a more general manner, or that the channels influencing it were other than public debate—for example, international development expert culture.

In the mid-1980s, parallel changes had taken place in the social work sector. American neo-liberal models were introduced in some municipalities in Sweden, embellished with buzz-words such as ‘rebuilding self-reliance’

and 'settling with clientism'. Schierup (1989:243) claims that this was done partly on the basis of leftist Swedish theoretizations of 'responsibility' and 'networking in social work', but the ideas were recognizable from social welfare ideologies launched by the New Right in several Western countries. The rhetorical emphasis was on client choice, responsibility and empowerment, while frequently a reality of costs, risks and workload was pushed over to hesitant, economically and educationally disadvantaged clients as in Hyatt's (1997) study of tenants in formerly state-subsidised housing in Britain

During the crisis-ridden 1990s, Sweden has suffered budget deficits, high unemployment, and not least, pressures from the international finance market and a constant threat of capital flight. The Social Democrats have made concessions to the neo-liberal way of framing the problems of society. Many people feel that the welfare system has been largely dismantled. Complaints over *bidragsberoende* (benefit dependency) and ideas of strict contractual agreements between clients and benefactors in the social security system have become more common in the debate.

One can draw close parallels between the terms applied in social work and those used in development discourse.[6] However, easy as it may be to label this language neo-liberal, many of the key terms are the same as have been prominent in social science and in radical politics of recognition and identity. They are ambiguous terms which have turned into 'essentially contested concepts' (Gallie 1956; Connolly 1974), over which people from different political strands try to claim ownership. A more benevolent interpretation is that used in the Swedish Social Democratic development ideology where they are an adaptation to a shared vocabulary, under the disguise of which more radical ideas are hidden. To be fair, in the Partnership policy, there are some signals used to mark distance from a neo-liberal or conservative approach, such as the under-secretary's urges for social inputs, a strong civil society and public responsibility (Karlsson, Sydsvenska Dagbladet, 1997-03-08). More striking are however the repeated references to Sweden's support for South African liberation from apartheid, and repeated and somewhat anachronistic criticism against colonialism. Support to liberation movements in Southern Africa is presented as part of a general anti-colonial stance which has "given us credibility and respect in Africa" (Schori, Arbetet, 1998-06-08, cf. Schori, DN, 1997-06-23). By compacting the various histories of different African regions, the speakers are able to capitalise on a Swedish

[6] That there are such parallels between the language towards the "colonies" and that of policies towards the poor of one's own country is not a new phenomenon, see Comaroff and Comaroff 1992 on Victorian discourses.

identity as separate from other Western powers—a Sweden untainted by colonial guilt.

References to the political solidarity of the 70s serve to enhance an image of continuity in change suitable to mobilise the continued support of Swedish solidarity workers, to maintain foreign images of Sweden and to ensure the trust of the African partners. That this image is not necessarily beyond doubt is evident from Olukoshi's retort in one of the conference reports (1997:78):

> The kinds of shifts in orientation from broad social democratic positions in Swedish development co-operation to the almost uncritical embrace, during the 1980's of IMF/World Bank positions in dealings with Africa do not commend Stockholm to its partners as a reliable and consistent ally.

The African delegates to the conferences in Saltsjöbaden and Abidjan, through which the policy was able to claim to be based in African opinions, were in several cases outspokenly critical about the Structural Adjustment programmes and their effects (i.a. Moyo, 1997, p. 61; Nkiwane, 1997, p.164; Olukoshi, 1997, p. 27, 1998, p. 19; Kiggundu, 1998; Tenga 1998). It is however evident from the speeches that neither Mr Karlsson nor Mr Schori shares this criticism of the substance of the reforms. Karlsson contentedly concludes that

> It is no longer about being for or against structural adjustment or market economy. It is taken for granted.

THE NATURE OF PARTNERSHIP

The name of the new policy is 'Partnership for Africa' and hence much of its rhetoric is attempts to define this concept. 'Partnership' has for many years been a slogan used in international development discourse, first perhaps just as a non-committing phrase, but coming into wider currency, it would seem, since the 1980s together with ideas of participation.[7] The concept appears to have got an international boost in the context of neoliberal public welfare reform, especially connected with urban renewal in England and USA. In that context, "partnership" refers to a relation of public-private multi-sectoral collaborations between a the local community or "civil society", private companies, NGOs and government. Some quotes will illustrate more precisely what meaning is claimed to rest in this term:

> Partnership is about co-operation on more equivalent conditions. It is about how to develop capacity making such co-operation possible, despite unequal qualifications (förutsättningar). It is about supporting African-governed processes

[7] Kumm 1996 notes that the concept was abundantly used for trans-Mediterranean relations at the big EU Mediterranean conference held in November 1995.

> of change, improving the provision for the majority of the people and strengthening the democracy. (Schori, DN, 1997-06-23, translated by the author)
>
> It means co-operation on equal conditions, and that clear contracts about what is expected from both partners are worked out in common. It is thought that through aid to self-aid that the aid should be dismantled in the long run. Ventures into industry and a freer trade are therefore important. (Karlsson quoted in Sydsvenska Dagbladet, 1997-03-08, translated by the author)
>
> ...an approach in a contractual co-operation built on a shared ground of values and reciprocal trust. To reach this there is needed a code of conduct that both partners respect. Common, clearly formulated goals, obligations and responsibility are part of the partnership...Partnership must not be an empty slogan. It has to be seen as a reciprocal conditionality that both partners agree on. The common ground of values that it rests on should be made up by some of those conventions that almost all countries have ratified. (Schori, Arbetet, 1998-06-08, translated by the author)
>
> Without a basic change of attitudes in both partners, partnership risks becoming an empty word. But with larger flexibility, new attitudes and new forms of co-operation it is possible to realise. The donor of today must become a partner, and the recipient of today must be the leader of tomorrow.[8] (Schori, DN, 1997-06-23, translated by the author)

That the positive, ultimate aim of the aid is to end aid is emphasised in several places. Here however attention is instead drawn in more negative terms to the finiteness and conditionality of a contractual arrangement. The theme is developed as it were in preparation for the donor's future blameless withdrawal in contrast to for example if the relationship had been constructed as one of friendship.

The relationship between partnership and solidarity

The policy is thus overtly directed against what it argues to be an earlier way of conceptualising development assistance—in terms of donors and recipients, patrons and clients. This is replaced by a model which defines it as a relationship built on a mutual contract, recognising both partners as agents with self-interest.

There are two essential ways of interpreting human co-operation, well-recognized by anthropologists. One is transactional and based on reciprocity and exchange between two autonomous carriers of agency, be they individuals or social groups. The other is based on 'organic solidarity' (Simmel, 1971)—loyal sharing between people defined as belonging together on the basis of some form of spiritual or material con-essentiality.

[8] Schori here presumably intends not to propose his own ultimate subordination but to say that the one who is taking a passive role in relation to external powers, has to turn inwards and take on agency and responsibility in relation to his internal dependants.

These principles of rightful sharing in a collective versus exchange between independent units are the ones we have to depart from when we consider the moral overtones of international assistance, or social work within modern society. We should see these forms of co-operation not as exclusive and absolute categories but rather as paradigms of interpretation, between which the various ideological readings of assistance may be swerving, offering alternative arguments to the partners involved. The limits between them as paradigms of interpretation are also not clear-cut.

In Swedish Social Democratic discourse, the basis of international assistance used to be 'solidarity', a model where the ultimate unity of reference was humanity. In one of the contributions to the Abidjan report (1997:27), Olukoshi argues for such values although at same time using the contractual metaphors:

> It would seem that in spite of the neo-liberal onslaught that we have witnessed around the world in recent times, now, more than ever before, is the time for us to revive the notion of a global social contract, and with it of global citizenship as an anchoring value and project for a new partnership. In this age of globalization it is quite appropriate that renewed commitments be made on a global scale to ensuring that everybody on earth is entitled to certain minimum economic social cultural and political rights and obligations that will enable everybody to live a rounded life irrespective of where they may find themselves on the planet. As the processes of globalisation march on, there is a need for an equally global vision that will move the business of development co-operation away from the realm of charity or cynicism to firmer grounds based on our shared humanity.

And he harangues Sweden for having a history of promoting such values internationally.

Yet, this emphasis on 'solidarity' relates to the very strong Swedish emphasis on immediately balanced reciprocity as the basis of ideal interpersonal relations, strongly linked to egalitarianism in its Swedish version. A traditional suspiciousness towards charity (*välgörenhet)* links up with ideas about personal integrity and equality. 'Charity' differs from 'solidarity' in that it relates to unequal exchange rather than to sharing. It is a transaction where lack of resources or agency transforms the return action to gratitude, subordination and loss of prestige. A redefinition of 'solidarity' as 'charity' opens it to criticism. Much of the history of Swedish development discourse reflects the problem how aid can be linguistically constructed as something different from charity. There is a long record of attempts to establish a less condescending way of talking about the 'other' and to achieve more egalitarian relations with the recipients of international aid. 'Solidarity' has been part of the traditional solution. It has been supposed to suggest a more

egalitarian approach, one of sharing within a group, defined by common humanity, or by con-essentiality based on the struggle for common goals. Debates over whether we are talking about 'aid' or 'assistance' or 'solidarity work' reflect such possible ambiguities of interpreting international development activities. In one of the few Swedish contributions to the Saltsjöbaden volume, and also one of the few places in the material where the concept of solidarity is elaborated, the author says about the Swedish popular movements

> ...we may question how much of the work has been based on real solidarity and respect for the fellow-being...We need to ask ourselves how much of our engagement in Africa has been prompted by a bad conscience about the social conditions of the continent without a willingness to address relevant political questions head-on. (Övergaard, 1998:225)

'Charity' is associated with buying your conscience free. 'Partnerskap' may in this context be seen as a rhetorical alternative to 'solidarity' which retains the ideological connotations of equality but has no element of suggested identity or shared membership in any larger collectivity.

Together with *jämlikhet* (equality) and *trygghet* (security) *solidaritet* has been a "key political shibboleth" (Rabo, 1997:107) in Sweden, important not only within the context of aid but also in the context of Swedish welfare. Though it is still a word to which many Swedes are strongly attached, one increasingly hears it referred to as somewhat naive and outdated, with a ring of the 70s. Boreus records that the term became gradually less frequent over the 70s and 80s. In the commissional report on Partnership, *solidaritet* which a number of years ago would have been seen as a strong rhetorical argument in its own right, is no longer trusted to stand on its own as a motive for help. Somewhat apologetically, the report notes that:

> The engagement for poor and suppressed peoples' situation remains, even if it may vary in intensity over time...The growing insight that the result of the engagement in practice far from only offers humanitarian results at a distance, but also plays a role in our own reality via global interdependence, strengthens the link between different motives.

That solidarity is nevertheless not completely dead as a political slogan is shown by that Mr Alf Svensson, the Christian Democratic party leader, in his opening speech of the election campaign of July 1998, explicitly tried to challenge the Left's monopoly over the term. He added, however, that a market economy is necessary to generate the resources needed for 'solidarity' (DN, 1998-07-17). When in the policy documents there is criticism against earlier forms of aid it is still not phrased as a questioning of 'solidarity' but rather as a rejection of 'charity' and gift-giving. 'Solidarity' is still a positively loaded term, while 'charity' has a definite negative load.

'Partnerskap' is an emotionally relatively neutral term in Swedish. One can wonder over its rhetorical efficiency and whether its frequent use in policy speeches will in the end perhaps contribute to reconstruct it as standing for immutable values. Will it ever have a performative value compared to that which *solidaritet* has had for certain generations of Swedes? [9] Wright (1993) calls such buzzwords which succeed in attracting mass popular support 'mobilising metaphors'. Apthorpe (op.cit.:54) notes about keywords such as 'co-operation' and 'participation', so common in aid discourse, that "they acquire much of their winning warmth from their popular meanings in everyday usage". Shore and Wright (1997:20) argue that the power of such words lies in their capacity to connect with and to appropriate the positive meanings and legitimacy derived from other key symbols of government such as 'nation', 'country', 'democracy' and 'law'. In Swedish *partnerskap* is in this sense a cold word. It normally belongs to the sphere of small enterprises. This sphere has been exalted in Swedish public discourse in the last decade. However, for close business co-operation *kompanjonskap* is probably more common. This has a tinge of intimate friendship which the more distant and businesslike *partnerskap* lacks. To a few of the participants in the public debates on the new Africa policy, the connotations of the term were even sinister. A chronicler in the tabloid Expressen retorted:

> Partnership is an ambiguous word, even if all call themselves partners, recently 67 countries did so in Denver. I remember how Sir Roy Welensky, leader in Southern Rhodesia in colonial times, defined partnership as the relationship between the rider and his horse. If practice proves that it means 'relationship between equals' that is something new however. (Ehnmark, Expressen, 1997-06-24, translated by the author)[10]

Quite apart from this prejudicating piece of history, one may also question whether the term appeals to the African audiences as a good mobilising metaphor for friendship. It surely weakens the element of paternalism but also introduces a distance to the relationship.

The policy suggests that 'enlightened self-interests' *(upplysta egenintressen)* are to rule Sweden's involvement in the partnership. It would be foolish to claim that the motivating force (in contrast to the rationale given) of Swedish aid has ever been altruism. Yet it is new as part of explicit legitimating ideology to refer to self-interest. Its place in the discourse has to be explained in terms of the fear of growing social discontent and xenophobia in the country itself, and a decreased 'will to assist' *(biståndsvilja).* How

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[9] *Partnerskap* has a new connotation in terms of formal marriage between gay people, but this is an innovation and irrelevant to the context.

[10] Similar arguments were heard from Björn Beckman at the public hearing on the policy that was arranged in Uppsala.

then does the report present the self-interests? The justification for involvement offered relates to global environmental issues: we have an interest in Africa because it has vegetation that needs to be protected to avoid global warming, and we will benefit from genetic diversity. The second item on the list is that Africa is the last possible arena for market expansion. It is argued that though Africa is marginal to Sweden's foreign trade today[11], we need to look at this from the basis of a "vision of long-term conditions for economic exchange". (Quite expectedly, the potential that trade benefits one partner more than the other is not spelt out, even in this context of *egenintresse*.) The third consideration for our *egenintresse* is that the continent has rich "historical and cultural resources and a great potential for tourism".

The suggested advantages to the Swedish partner are thus put in rather general terms. Although the rhetoric around the policy puts heavy emphasis on emancipating the recipient through re-labelling him/her as a partner, the contractual form is expected to give room for Sweden to make other counterclaims, in even more immaterial values such as those of adherence to principles of human rights, and efficiency and accountability in terms of disposing of offered resources. "There has been a tendency to a Big Brother attitude among those who have sat on the money", Schori says. (DN-debatt, 1997-06-23, translated by the author) In their task of development the Africans need "support but from positive partners, not reproaching guardians (*förmyndare*)".

Nevertheless, the requirements and demands that can be made by Sweden in the envisaged partnership do not only refer to the co-operation itself narrowly undertaken, but

> Equality means that the same demands are made on our African counterparts to follow common international agreements, i.e. regarding human rights, as we pose to e.g. European partners. They deal with political and civil rights, equality, the rights of children, basic democratic rules and social and economic rights. The purpose is not to swing the moralistic whip over poor countries but to establish a basic ethics for the co-operation. If this is lacking, partnership is not possible[12] (Schori, Arbetet 1998-06-08, translated by the author).

The interests and conditions of the two parties and a common value declaration should be formulated as part of the contract for each programme.

These expectations are fair, but it must be recognised that the technical measurability of performances presupposed by a contract relationship is far away. We are thus talking about an attempt to dress a moral message in the

[11] Schori notes that the Swedish companies appear hesitant to exploit the goodwill that Sweden has in countries such as South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda, as compared to some US and South East Asian companies. (DN-debatt 1997-06-23)

[12] For this reason, Zaire is explicitly excluded from the range of potential 'partners'.

seemingly neutral cloth of a business contract whereby one party yields the right for others to criticise it on aspects of human morality and good governance.

AGENCY AND THE WORTHY SELF

One central idea held forth is the idea that the African needs both to be turned into a subject and to be recognized as one, two assumedly mutually reinforcing processes. The partnership relationship should be marked by "Reciprocal respect and trust. The parties must see each others as equals, not as subjects and objects", states the under-secretary of state, relating himself to a contemporary trope in Western public discourse whereby to be an 'object' is inherently bad. To be in the direction of other people's agency is thus equalised with being a non-human, material thing, denoting a passivity or humiliation which goes beyond the immediate situation.

Agency has been a very central concept not only in social sciences such as anthropology and sociology in the 90s. It also has a prominent place in contemporary political discourse. In Burchell's terms (1993:119) it is by creating free agents who take their own initiatives, that liberalism makes the political subject governable. With a little more distance in time, the interconnection between these spheres of usage will probably be more accessible for our meta-reflection. The will and competence to act is also strongly morally loaded. In the moral codes of assistance, lack of agency is often a possible legitimating cause for help. To be worthy of assistance you have to be a person who does not wilfully refrain from using his or her agency.

Midre (1990) analyses how Norwegian society through history has delimited socially acceptable begging and defined categories of people as worthy to receive alms and social security benefit. Public interference which is not based on universal rights presupposes delimiting rules. Such rules tend to have three dimensions (Gunnarsson 1993:63). Two dimensions relate to the personal assets and resources that the beneficiary has for supporting him/herself, and to the market for participating in production. Lack of health, a handicap, old age and (in the modern period), lack of education, are seen as forms of resource deficits that make assistance morally acceptable. The third dimension refers to the moral of the aided individual, to his desire to work and support him or herself. While the emphasis on the resource and market dimensions have varied over time, what has been constant throughout is that one way of questioning somebody's right to get assistance is to question that person's own willingness to act.

Many conventional Western ways of talking about people in other, less privileged societies tend to confirm an image of them, that conceptually robs the presumptive aid recipients of their agency. The actions of the recipients are guided either by bad or misguided knowledge, or by faults in rationality, or are presupposed to reflect a lack of capacity and will to act.

Questioning the client's preparedness to act on his or her own, or claiming that inactivity is caused by the wrong reasons, are argumentative tools that can be used to put an awkward obligation to assist in doubt. The best client is the client incapacitated by his or her innate limitations, or by structural constraints. Neither in the world of social world, nor in that of development are all those who seem to lack agency in helping themselves seen as equally worthy recipients. The cause of such assumed lack is decisive and becomes the subject of conflict and debate. Arguments again relate to the three different levels. Leftist analyses normally emphasise structural and situational constraints the first and second level, while neo-liberal arguments often limit the range of acceptable structural causes of inactivity to undue regulatory interference by the state. Such liberal analyses then ultimately fall back on blaming the would-be clients' morale and on holding the failures accountable for their own lack of success.

In the development vocabulary, there are several keywords relating to human agency and the causes of its obstruction. Examples of such words are 'empowerment' and 'capacity building' which have high mobilising value, transcending and hiding ideological difference regarding the causes of passivity. Like 'community' (Williams, 1983) and 'development' (Dahl and Hjort, 1984) nobody can be against them. Fischer (1997:442), writing on the literature on NGOs, lists 'empowerment' with a number of other terms with which it is frequently linked , e.g. 'participation', and 'local community', noting that they are put into equally good use by "international development agencies like the World Bank as by radical critics of top-down development". The concept 'empowerment' has an inherent ambiguity in that it may be read either to offer a capacity to deal with e.g. structural constraints or to fill an assumed gap in the personal capacity to manage things according to normative standards, whereby the empowered will hopefully reach the level of the empowerer. The latter interpretation is easily married to traditional class- or race-based stereotypes, defining the poor as a "defective population in need of professional guidance and discipline from the outside" (Hyatt op.cit.: 231), permanently, if the explaining theory is racial, or temporarily if it is developmental. Strict neoliberalism claims superiority over such approaches by basically defining all humans as "democratic citizens with rights and responsibilities"(cf. Miller and Rose, 1990) and with

innate potentiality. Such discourse may be similar to that of the Partnership Policy claim to strive to denounce paternalism, but falls back on explaining the client's failure either with that he lags behind in attaining capacity, that he is unduly dependent or fails to stand up to responsibility. In neo-liberal discourse, all people are endowed with potentialities, yet the implementation of these potentialities depends on the will and confidence to take on responsibility over one's life. Though this is not explicitly stated, the assumption appears to be that there is a widespread human propensity to shed responsibility whenever possible, i.e. when somebody else intervenes, taking your initiatives, the risk is acute for 'dependency' *(beroende)* in a psychological sense. The concepts of 'aid dependency' and 'a culture of dependency' are well-known neo-liberal rhetorical tools, imported from the language of social work, but also occurring profusely in the rhetoric of aid, e.g. in the present context.

Dean and Taylor-Gooby (1992) trace the history of the term dependency in social work in England. They ambitiously set out to empirically explode the model by studies of clients' perceptions and experiences, taking the trope as a claim about reality rather than a rhetorical turn. Their case probably illustrates how social science more easily supplies political metaphors than explodes political myths. From their summary emerge three different ways that neo-liberal scientists have approached the assumed problem that the payment of certain types of social security encourages people to rely on benefit and lowers their desire to find work or behave in a responsible manner. The two first basic mechanisms suggested by the authors they survey are 'rational choice' and 'culture'. Government creates an environment for a counterproductive—but rational—calculus over the costs and benefits associated with different ways of finding support, and this is then culturally reinforced in a particular social setting. Yet another aspect is psychological: dependency is the result of a loss of confidence in the control the individual senses him or herself to have over his life.

In Sweden, like in England, these concepts have been activated as part of discourse directed against traditional social democratic values as embodied in the concept of the *folkhem*—a state where according to its opponents "all initiative is taken away from the individual, who is rendered helpless and passive by too much 'spoon feeding' from the state" (Rabo, 1997:111). Aid dependence is also a key concept in the Partnership discourse. 'The Africans' have been similar to the unworthy social aid client who does not take on responsibility for his or her own social emancipation, whose self-confidence is destroyed by gifts and can only be restored by activating his own agency:

> The new liberation [from just being recipients] must come from their own hands, it has to be the work of Africa itself. (Karlsson, quoted in Sydsvenska Dagbladet 1997-03-08, translated by the author)

Aid dependency can be seen as a structural problem, or be related to the rational, strategic use of aid as a resource by the leadership of a country, or as a cultural phenomenon. There is also often a slip-of-thought from the structural level to the level of the psychological preparedness of individual aid recipients. Key-words of political discourse as it were, wander up and down between these levels. In the rhetoric of the partnership commission (also as it is reflected in the report) what has made the Africans lose their agency is colonialism and slavery, reflecting again the psychologizing idea that loss of self-confidence is of critical import to the development of 'dependency'.

We find here a transposition of neo-liberal arguments pertaining to the passivized individual citizen waiting to be empowered, to the level of a state or even a continent. Of the three possible causes for the postulated dependent passivity culture and lack of confidence seem to be central to the policy rhetorics. The 'rational choice model' for understanding dependency is perhaps less useful as it tends to place the blame on the structural constraints rather than on the client, unless in projecting instrumental and cunning clients exploiting a supply of donors. Rationality is a basic value usually rhetorically reserved for the one who has the upper hand.

In the Partnership Policy discourse dependence is initially caused by violence, then aggravated by gifts, and finally petrified into culture. The task is rhetorical and neither Schori nor Karlsson develops further the idea of a culture of dependency, it is just a trope not a precise analytical attempt. The 'culture of dependency' is denounced but it is not specified where it is localised and reproduced—among the political power holders, the poor, the donors etc. One aspect of the homogeneity implied by the rhetoric is the assumption of a shared African history.[13] The under-secretary thus stated at the opening of the conference in Abidjan:

> Let us speak clearly and say what we mean. I believe we are all acutely aware of what is at stake. So let me immediately turn to the substance. The liberation of any person must be his and her own act. I do not hesitate to use a Marxian turn of phrase to start off with. In the language of dialectics we can say: Africans must again become the subject of their own destiny, no longer the object of someone else's design. Not a new perspective to you who are here, but nonetheless of singular importance. If we are talking about African choice and change, understanding the need for that fundamental shift—Africa as subject, not as

[13] To be fair, again more evident in the officials´ talks about the commission report than in the report itself.

> object— logically precedes any policy recommendations and any modes of co-operation. Cooperate we must. We have long passed any opportunity for the African subject to, as it were, develop on its own. Integration, and to some degree interdependence, have simply gone too far. The genie is out of the bottle We are in the situation together—and we had better find a partnership that works. Any opportunity to develop on its own basis was stolen from the Africans by slavery, and definitely through colonialism. I believe that history should not be swept under the carpet.
>
> ....the greatest burden in changing this dialectic falls on the Africans. They have to make the greatest changes, not only in transcending the memory and legacy of slavery and colonialism, and their latter day phenomena of apartheid and great power games, but more importantly, also from the structures and limitations of the generation of the first African liberation...

This speech essentially suggests four historical periods—a) the largely implicit one of a neutral and pristine state, b) the one of slavery and colonisation, c) a lamented period of post-colonial failures and d) the future. The commission's report has 'slave-trade' but in the under secretary's speech it is rather 'slavery' that has been the problem suffered by the Africans. The speech here probably reaches its zenith of cultural insensitivity, as many people consider it extremely rude to hint that somebody descends from slaves. In any case slavery as such is certainly not an identity-bearing experience or historical symbol to which a majority of contemporary Africans relate in the same way as for example Afro-Americans could possibly do. The interpretation of blackness celebrated in the cultural realm that Paul Gilroy refers to as "The Black Atlantic", and for which he suggests the slave-ship as a central unifying symbol, seems here to be superimposed on the image of Africa itself as a curious expression of Western cultural dominance (Gilroy, 1993). Even though the slave-trade and slave wars in their time created immense suffering, they did not turn a majority of the continent's population into slaves. Despite the effort to ring the resonance of experienced hardships, the rhetoric turns into superficial clichés with shallow connection to the lived experiences of contemporary people. A large proportion of the population of Africa was born after independence. They may suffer from the effects of colonialism, like we all suffer or benefit from the effects of history, but their personal experience is more marked by the vicissitudes, humiliation and triumphs of post-colonial life. Colonialism in a strict sense may be a highly important tale of the past to them, but it is nevertheless a mediated, not a lived tale. For a far smaller, older generation, experience spans both these periods and influences their trust both in local power-holders and foreign intervenors.

Another problem here is the boundaries posed between blameable and non-blameable actors during different periods. Like colonialism, slavery is

presented in these speeches as entirely an expression of external agency, the consequence of which has been to bereave the Africans of their agency. Neither in the time of the slave-trade, nor during post-colonial regimes have there been clear-cut borders between innocent African victims and vile external power-holders. To begin with, African history is (like any) also internally a history of colonisers and colonised, of slavers and enslaved, of mediators, facilitators, profiteers, resisters, and victims. Secondly, even if rulers in post-colonial Africa have been men with their own agency, the end of colonialism did not end external influences. Any temporal dichotomization between internal and external actors and influences can only be artificial, neglecting the intersection of local and non-local systems of power (Abu Lughod, 1990:42; Long, 1989). In the rhetoric analysed, considerations of such external influences is limited to the few words 'great power games' dividing responsibility for the problems of the contemporary period between the colonial foreigners of the more distant past and the corrupt leaders of the post-independence period, thus leaving present-day African leaders as well as present-day foreigners without blame. Intercontinental structures of dependency that may have contributed to misdevelopment in the post-colonial era are also left aside: while the word 'dependency' occurs with some frequency it is more commonly as a characteristic of the attitude of the dependant, than denoting constraints on the latter's range of action. The word has lost all contact with the structural subordination contained in the analysis of the dependency school, and turned into a moral shortcoming of the client.

AFRICANS WITH AGENCY: THE NEW GENERATION

The idea of a lack of psychological self-confidence is seen as crucial to this dependency. Your self-confidence and will to act are again a reflection of the image of yourself. Empowerment in this rhetoric comes by being treated with confidence and given responsibility: it is addressed by a "therapeutic model of self-improvement" (Hyatt, p.233 quoting also Rose, 1992; Cruikshank, 1993) rather than by reforms at the structural level or by resource reallocation. The partnership policy is however highly ambiguous. It is presented as a policy which avoids being paternalistic and contemptuous. Yet it is also introduced to the Swedish audience as an instrument to make counterclaims in terms of good governance and observation of human rights. The policy is depicted as a contrast to old-fashioned policies where recipients were not held accountable because of naive, leftist idealism, assumedly motivating the donors to '*just hand over*'. Such lenience is described as not only inefficient and an opening for corruption and but above all desultory and thereby destructive of agency.

> The Africans ask us to make the same demands on them as on everybody else. Everything else is contemptuous. It is not a return to the aid politics of the 60s and 70s, assures Karlsson. (Sydsvenska Dagbladet 1997-03-08, translated by the author)

Again we find a kind of transposition between the discourses addressing individuals as recipients of social benefits and collective entities such as African states or even the continent itself. Lack of agency is implied both on the level of the metaphorical super-individual and that of real individual citizens. The whole emancipatory idea behind the reformulation of the policy has in fact the character of such collective therapy by means of an idealistic reconstruction.

The authors of the partnership policy and of the speeches are, as has been said, eager to change the image of Africa. This entails balancing the negativism of any problem description with optimism. Above all, the positive side is achieved by depicting an image of immanent change by 'a new generation of Africans'. This imagery is (as far as I have been able to ascertain) first activated by one of the participants in the Abidjan conference, once again the eloquent Dr Olukoshi (1997:29):

> As the 20th century draws to a close, there is a new generation which is emerging out of the ashes of crisis and decline in Africa. It is a self-assured generation that is prepared to engage the world on equal terms. Its faith in the continent is deep rooted and its determination to make Africa a home of which Africans can be proud is clear. That generation consists of people who are confident of themselves and are driven by a zeal to transform Africa both internally and in terms of its relationships with the rest of the world. It is a generation that is acutely aware of the potentials of Africa and the obstacles within and outside the continent that must be surmounted in order for those potentials to be fully realised.

The point put forward by Dr Olukoshi is eagerly taken up by the Swedish officials, so that the idea of a coming breakthrough can be sustained, by repeated reference to the coming of an entirely new generation of young new leaders. Mr Karlsson emphasises that "We have to trust the new democratic forces in Africa" (Sydsvenska Dagbladet 1997-03-08, translated by the author) and , Mr Schori states "The Africans demand and are prepared to take responsibility for the future." (DN-debatt 1997-06-23, translated by the author)[14]

"The countries are in a better position to handle this today since they are more democratic," says Mats Karlsson, "and there is quite a new type of speech among the new, democratic leaders."

[14] The African leaders referred to are substantially represented by those who were invited to the Saltsjöbaden conference: Vice Presidents Mrs Specioza Kazibwe from Uganda, Festus Mogae from Botswana (who has later advanced to head of state) and Thabo Mbeki from South Africa.

The image of being passive, misinformed or spoilt is thus pushed back a generation:

> Most African countries have held democratic elections, and a new generation of African leaders speak up, but the new leaders must get a chance to take responsibility for their people. (Schori, Arbetet 1998-06-08, translated by the author)
>
> Poverty does not itself lead to aid dependency. The causes are rather to be sought in weak politics. The consciousness about this is growing among the African leaders of today and it is already anchored in the new generation of Africans, that we see as our future partners of co-operation. (DN-debatt 1997-06-23, translated by the author)

As some of this rhetoric was delivered at the time of Laurent Kabila's armed victory procession in Congo, the main daily paper *Dagens Nyheter* reacted by asking in an editorial for "analyses and insights on the risk for new lines of confrontation being drawn in black (sic!) Africa" in response to "the network of polemical not to say pugnacious African leaders which has become evident" (DN 1997-08-20). Clearly, propaganda used at the level of generalization has a propensity to backfire by creating negative feelings at the same high level of generalizations at the next political crisis. Changing the image of Africa takes more than assuming distinctions in terms of generations or temporal units. It necessitates the dissolution of the overarching concept 'Africa' itself except as a geographical framework.

CONCLUSION

When human individual behaviour or relations are used to provide metaphors for the predicament of states, nationalities or even continents, there is always the risk of a further transposition of meaning, whereby the psychological states associated with the model tend to be projected back onto the collective of citizens. As Karp has noted (ms, 1993). Such conceptualizations abound in development discourse linking it with Orientalist and colonialist thinking by the way it defines the other in terms of agency, morality and personhood. Much development work is thus in itself still focused on transforming the individual not only in terms of knowledge and skills but also morally, as a way of transforming society. Development discourse takes place in a space where on the one hand scientific formulations play an important role in providing legitimating arguments, but where on the other hand political appeals are made in broad, generalizing and moralistic terms: concepts and tropes à la mode are put to use at different levels with very different consequences.

The new Swedish policy for Africa is written in a situation of cross pressure where the Swedish Government wishes both to signal that it is keeping expenses down, using resources efficiently on one hand, and that it stands for enlightened internationalism. An ideological emphasis on recognizing the other as an equal partner, an autonomous agent, is its main tool for the latter. Yet, in the discourse the officials appear to fail to break away radically from the image they claim to want to dispose of.

First, the rhetorical continental reference to 'Africa' can hardly be divorced from prejudices and connotations deeply entrenched in a cultural heritage well-known to anthropologists and mediated by colonial ideologies, travel tales, and all forms of popular and literary metaphors associating 'Africa' with undomesticated naturality, unbridled animal instincts, immaturity, irresponsibility and infections (see Seidel and Vidal, 1997:62, Comaroff & Comaroff, 1992) or at best 'possibly' natural and authentic 'Gemeinschaft' or sensuality. Talking about Africa and Africans in a way that disregards the continent's variation of historical, economic and political identities and experiences, is also a denial of agency, as Seidel and Vidal express it (1997:62, 77) quoting Patton (1992) "a conceptual and political violence". The tendency to talk about Africans as if they were a homogenous category, with no differences of state or nation and demarcated from the rest of the world is also odd considered in the context where states normally like to present themselves as autonomous, rational actors (Stade, 1998:58). Whereas the texts of the conference reports personalize Sweden as such an actor, a metaphorical super-person,[15] she/he would seem to be operating towards partners that are not allowed their own named identity but are only seen as representatives of generalized Africanness.

Secondly, as part of proper analysis, agency has always to be related to the situation in which the agent acts. As part of political talk however, it is often difficult to maximise recognition and compassion at the same time: to be both recognized as a willing and able actor and as in need of assistance and solidarity. Agency is too easily turned into just a characteristic of the agent, in order to divert attention from the context and from important issues of constraints and power differences, leaving an opening for blaming the victim.

[15] A person referred to as 'she' by Toure (1997:33), probably through diplomatic convenience, and as a 'brother' by Dr D. T. Ofori-Atta

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